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SENSITIVE, SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/IPA (KPHELAN AND NSHAMPAIN), NEA/PPD (QBRADFORD AND  
PAGNEW) AND ECA/A/E/NEA-SCA (LALAMI AND DIVES)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KPAL](#) [IS](#) [PHUM](#)

SUBJECT: THREE U.S.-BOUND GAZAN STUDENTS DETAINED AT EREZ CROSSING

¶1. (SBU) Summary. On July 14, only two of the five Gazans whose transit through Erez crossing Post had sought to facilitate were approved. The other three were unable to travel to Jerusalem for their visa interviews. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On July 2, Post submitted the names of five Gazans (Said Elmadhoun, Fadi Elhindi, Islam Elboji, Ashraf Abuamsha, and Nidal Kafarna) to COGAT Erez and requested permission for them to exit Gaza and travel to Jerusalem for visa interviews on July 14. Of the five, one was selected for an IVLP, one is the husband of a Fulbright '08 student, and three are undergraduate students who were advised by AmidEast and accepted with full scholarships to U.S. universities. Post asked them to arrive at Erez very early July 14 to allow for processing time. Post also sent a car and PD FSN to meet the group at Erez and escort them to and from Jerusalem.

¶3. (SBU) Only two of the five Gazans were able to travel to Jerusalem to apply for their visas on July 14. These two departed Erez at 1300 in order to make it to and from Jerusalem before the Erez crossing closed. The other three were detained for various periods of time by the Israeli authorities at Erez and were unable to travel to Jerusalem. They were not informed whether their permits were approved, albeit too late in the day for them to travel to and from Jerusalem before Erez closed.

¶4. (SBU) Below is a summary of the events at Erez, including excerpts from their personal accounts:

--Islam Elboji: She was initially approved and sat in the waiting area for four hours with the two others who were approved and then informed by the Israeli authorities that she required extra processing. She was subsequently sent back to Gaza without further questioning and told to return in a week. She was not informed whether her permit was approved. She wrote: "At 12:35 PM, the Israeli employee gave Said AL-Madhoon his ID and permission while she did not call me and I have waited until 1:40 PM when another Israeli guy came and told me to return back to Gaza and come again on July 21 at 9:00 AM. So I have taken my ID and returned back."

--Ashraf Abuamsha: He waited three hours in the processing terminal before further questioning. He was then sent back to Gaza. He was not told whether his permit was approved. He wrote: "The questioning lasted for about one hour and I was asked ordinary questions about my work in the ICRC, family, parents, brothers, sisters and friends. Then they sent me back again upstairs to the big waiting room for 15 minutes and gave me my ID and asked me to go back to Gaza."

--Nidal Kafarna: Mr. Kafarna is a YES high school exchange program alumnus who was questioned by the GOI for eight hours when he returned from his year abroad in 2006. This time, he was questioned for ten hours (0800 - 1800), including two interview sessions and long waiting periods, and required to strip to his underwear. Afterwards, he was told to return to Gaza. He was not told whether his permit was approved. He wrote: "After a while, I was led back to the waiting alley, where I had started; they gave me my belongings on the way. I thought it was all over, and that things

were working fine for me. I was asked to go to the booth where a different woman was sitting, she handed me my ID card and pointed at a gate behind me. The gate had the word GAZA written on it. I couldn't believe myself; I am going back to Gaza."

15. (SBU) Post understands that Embassy Tel Aviv is raising this issue with the GOI to seek assurances that the Israeli authorities at Erez will facilitate the Gazans' travel to Jerusalem for their rescheduled visa interviews. ConGen Jerusalem will follow up in conjunction with Embassy Tel Aviv.

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